

A Look At An Undercover Terrorist

By NARDA ZACCHINO
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SAN DIEGO, Calif. — Howard Berry Godfrey is an unimposing ex-San Diego city fireman who seems out of character in the role of a right-wing terrorist.

But that is the part he played for five years when he served simultaneously as a member of several right-wing paramilitary organizations and as an informant for the San Diego office of the FBI.

Godfrey, now 32, discussed his activities in an interview with The Los Angeles Times.

He detailed a number of the groups' activities, including:

CONDUCTING a reign of terror against the left in a series of attacks including bombings, burglaries and harassment.

PLOTTING the assassinations of President Nixon and several controversial leftists.

STEALING membership files and lists from leftist organizations. Godfrey said he turned these files over to the right-wing extremists and the FBI.

DAMAGING cars of leftists by slashing tires, throwing hydrochloric acid and firebombs.

Godfrey's activities are the focus of an investigation by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence into allegations that Godfrey was used by the FBI to wreak havoc on the left, a charge the bureau has denied.

These allegations and some of the details of Godfrey's activities have emerged in newspaper and magazine articles — the first time three and a half years ago in a San Diego alternative newspaper, the Door, and most recently in New Times Magazine and the San Diego Union.

But Godfrey's own story never has been told.

For the first time, he talked about his role and the role of the FBI during the years 1967 to 1972. And he explained how a quiet man at age 24 could decide to forego a normal life for one of danger and violence.

This is his account.

He had just been discharged in Texas as a weather observer in the U.S. Air Force in late 1966 when Godfrey met a family acquaintance in San Diego who invited him to join a right-wing extremist group.

Unsure of the goals and practices of the group, Godfrey, who considers himself "a Goldwater conservative," sought advice from a member of his church. Through this friend, he contacted another church member, an agent from the San Diego FBI office, "and he asked me to infiltrate and furnish some information," Godfrey recalled.

By early 1967, Godfrey was a member of the Phantom Cells, then a right-wing "survival... and guerrilla group associated with the Minutemen," he said.

It was the beginning of Godfrey's five-year career as an informant and extremist, a career that ended when he was subpoenaed to appear before a San Diego County grand jury investigating the paramilitary Secret Army Organization.

That testimony came after right-wing violence in San Diego. His role in it had escalated to the point at which the FBI could no longer conceal his identity from police. It resulted in indictments and complaints filed against eight right-wing extremists for various offenses.

In his double role, Godfrey had different pseudonyms for his different audiences. He was "Capt. Mike McGann" to the right wing and "Jerome" to the FBI. "I used it (the name Jerome) after the first two years to make contacts," he said. "I signed my reports with the code name Jerome, although receipts for money I was paid I signed with my own name."

He made his FBI contact "primarily through phone calls." But sometimes he met his contacts.

"We used to meet a couple of times a week, in parking lots throughout the city, behind stores, anywhere that happened to be handy. We would grab a few minutes and talk," he said.

One former contact agent at the San Diego FBI office vouched for Godfrey's credibility.

"Anything you've gotten from him, you can pretty well stay with," Special Agent Jordan Naylor said. "... I trust him implicitly. There is no reason to distrust his integrity. You can depend on what he says as accurate."

His rise from recruit to head of the San Diego branch of the Minutemen to co-founder of the Secret Army Organization corresponded to an increase in his FBI pay and an escalation in violence against the left in San Diego.

"The first few months I made almost nothing," he said. "They didn't know what I was going to do or put out or anything." By the end of his stint as an informant, his base pay was \$250 a month "plus a couple hundred a month expenses... I can't say I was paid on the basis of production because I got paid regardless of what I did."

What he and his right-wing did was extensive.

Activities which began on a minor scale, such as disrupting anti-war demonstrations, escalated to shootings and bombings, death threats and burglaries. Legal pranks led to illegal acts.

Although "many of the acts were spontaneous," Godfrey said, he reported all acts to his FBI superior, who sometimes had prior knowledge of them.

"For instance, I would report (to the FBI) that one night we were going to go out and harass the Street Journal (an alternative newspaper). And that night we would put up SAO stickers or we might put a rock through their windows with a slingshot or we might throw a flare into a car parked in front of the building," Godfrey said.

Sometimes, however, harassment of the Street Journal and the Door newspapers — both now defunct — was more serious.

"Our organization did the attack on the Door when their printing equipment was smashed," Godfrey said, adding they also smashed the printing equipment at the Street Journal.

"They were both complete disasters," he said. No one was ever prosecuted for these acts, a district attorney's spokesman said.

There was also a series of burglaries, some of which Godfrey said he committed, including one of a house in Vista from which he took Communist Party records and files, and break-ins of the Peace and Freedom Party headquarters and leftist offices, where he got lists of names and addresses.

These lists, he said, he would turn over to right-wing extremists to copy for their intelligence files, then the FBI, to copy for their files.

Did the FBI encourage him to steal?

"Well, the FBI was happy to get the files, but it's hard to say whether it was encouragement of the FBI or the agent. I don't know whether encouragement was official or unofficial," he

said. He said he did get one financial bonus from the FBI for files he stole.

Godfrey referred to the "intelligence files" kept by the right as "a sort of hit list" so the right would know who to target in case of a Communist takeover of the government.

Among other pranks, the right-wingers would try to diminish attendance at demonstrations by calls to radio stations and letters alleging to be from leftist leaders saying the demonstrations had been canceled or postponed.

Once, he said, he and another man spread carpet tacks over the grassy area where a demonstration was to be held and "here come 5,000 barefooted hippies stomping into it. It was rather funny... We used to do things like this regularly."

It was the vigilante Minutemen who planned to assassinate a Chicago 7 defendant and controversial Marxist college professors Angela Davis and Herbert Marcuse in San Diego, Godfrey claimed.

A plot to hang Marcuse and Miss Davis by throwing them off the bridge over San Diego's Highway 395 was scrapped in favor of hanging them in effigy.

Godfrey said he was convinced the assassination plots could have been carried out, but "I talked it down to prevent it from happening. I said it would make them (Marcuse and Davis) martyrs."

Godfrey implicated a San Diego County supervisor, Lou Conde, in the effigy hanging scheme. Conde admitted it was his idea, but he denied any connection with the Minutemen or any assassination plots.

The most violent of the groups was the Secret Army Organization, which Godfrey said he co-founded with Jerry Lynn Davis in 1971 after the demise of the Minutemen faction in San Diego.

The Minutemen began to die out "partially because I wasn't putting in as much effort to keep them going as I probably should have," Godfrey admitted.

After the SAO was formed in September, 1971, "Things began to pick up," he said.

"The FBI was definitely interested in my participating (in the SAO). I don't know how instrumental I was in founding the SAO. I was there during all the organizing."

He became assistant state commander, San Diego County coordinator and state intelligence officer for the group.

"In my command I had 8 or 10 people who I was in contact with in San Diego, although some of them had people working under them," he said. "I could reach 45 to 50 people, maybe more..."

He said the army was well-armed and in addition to several smaller weapons members had a flame thrower, 50-caliber machine guns, antitank rifles, and hand grenades.

The position of the FBI in all his activities was, "Stay out of it as much as I could," Godfrey said. Stay in but stay out. "In other words, I was not encouraged to participate in any illegal activities and encouraged to prevent as much illegal activity as I could, which I did."

Citing his role of leadership, he described his plight: "I was in so deep I had to do a certain amount of activity to maintain my cover."

FBI Director Clarence Kelley said:

"We did not commission him nor would we condone him to commit any acts that have been alleged. We certainly would not engage in any acts of that type."

Kelley, who became director in 1973, said the FBI never funded the SAO.

However, Godfrey said he used FBI "expense" money to help pay for an IBM typewriter and to pay for some of the SAO "bulletins," including one poster distributed in February, 1972, containing a picture of President Nixon indicating the President was "Wanted for Treason." It demanded the President's arrest.

The poster criticized Nixon for dealing with "The Red China Gang" with "his chief henchman Henry (Czar) Kissinger."

San Diego was picked as the Republican convention site in July, 1971, but party leaders in May, 1972, decided to move it to Miami.

For the 10 months during which it was slated for San Diego, law enforcement officials watched as both the left and right planned protests and counter-protests.

The most serious act was a planned attack by the SAO on Nixon that Godfrey reported to his FBI superiors. He explained the SAO felt Nixon was too liberal because of his moves to restore relations with the Communist Chinese.

"They (the SAO) were talking about firing 80mm. mortar rounds into the San Diego Sports Arena while Nixon was speaking," Godfrey said. "The same man who was going to give us the two mm. mortar rounds was going to give us a 50mm. mortar and 60 hand grenades."

Godfrey was never prosecuted for any of his activities, although "I had to itemize my activities for the district attorney's office and when he (the prosecutor) saw that list, he figured I'd be the easiest one of the bunch to prosecute."

Said a member of the district attorney's staff who was involved in the case: "It appears to me he (Godfrey) was acting under the advisement or with the consent of the FBI."

The FBI's Brown noted the agency does not watch carefully over its informants because "an informant is not one of our employees."

"It is obvious Godfrey lacked the supervision he should have been given," said Dick Hoffman, chief deputy district attorney in San Diego.